

## *Hotels, Inns, Boardinghouses & Taverns*



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Flames leap from the window of a second story apartment at the Winsor House Inn when an electrical fire forced the evacuation of about 35 dinner patrons last Thursday night.

*Photo Leslie Lawrence*

### **Winsor House Fire Confined to Second Floor Apartment**

The historic Winsor House Inn on Washington St. was the scene of a fire last Thursday night as dinner patrons and bridal shower guests were in the middle of their meals.

Fire Chief Bill Harriman said the fire, estimated to have caused about \$45,000 damage, was believed to be electrical in origin caused by a vaporizer in a second floor room which was accidentally switched on or believed to have been turned on when something fell on it.

Local Realtor Leslie Lawrence was dining in the pub

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area of the Winsor House with Nona Aigler and Jean Whalen about 8:30 pm when they noticed lights flickering. She said a waiter calmly entered the room and announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, there is a fire on the roof. Please leave quickly and safely as you entered through the front door."

About 32 people were evacuated from the restaurant, according to fire officials.

Some dinner patrons, including Bud and Priscilla Whalen, calmly carried their desserts outside as a crowd gathered to watch the firefighters extinguish the blaze, according to Lawrence, who said the Carriage Room and pub were full at the time of the fire. There was also a private dinner party in the dining room.

No one was injured as firefighters cleared the area and extinguished the blaze after ventilating the second floor apartment area. Two engines, a ladder truck and 3 service vehicles were at the scene within 5 minutes of the 911 call. The fire was declared under control at 8:47 pm.

Built in 1803, the Winsor House Inn has maintained its period charm thanks to the efforts of owners David and Patricia O'Connell. David O'Connell purchased the restaurant in 1976 and except for a brief 4-year lease-purchase option in the early 90's with Myles Maguire, has enjoyed a steady business of loyal customers.

The night of the fire, David was out of town at a funeral, according to his wife.

O'Connell said that she got the first news of the fire from dinner patrons who spotted smoke upstairs while sitting at a corner table of the outside patio area. Immediately after, a young boy leaving the restaurant with his parents, ran back in and reported seeing flames coming from the upstairs window over the Carriage Room.

O'Connell said she and one of the chefs immediately went upstairs to the apartment, where tenants were not at home, taking a fire extinguisher in an attempt to douse the flames.

"When Jerry and I tried to enter the apartment the smoke was just so thick we couldn't see. The bedroom door to where the fire started was closed and we were told that it's a good thing we couldn't open it. The closed door apparently confined the fire until help arrived."

There is some smoke and water damage, upstairs and in the Carriage Room. Upstairs furniture and other damaged materials were thrown out the windows. A half circle window, which was a historic part of the decor, will need to be replaced, but the dining room and pub were left unscathed.

Water cascaded everywhere, according to O'Connell; down the walls of the Carriage Room. Glass and wood flew into the parking lot as firefighters worked to put out the fire.

The Winsor House reopened for business the next day in the pub and dining room area. The carriage room reopened Saturday. The O'Connells plan to proceed with plans for a wedding there this weekend.

Repairs will be made once insurance adjusters complete their assessments.

"We always tried to preserve the history. Anything we tried to do was in the period," she said.

Last Thursday was a busy evening at the Winsor House. Many people left in the middle of their meals, O'Connell said. Some have even called after insisting they pay their bills though it wasn't expected, she said.

About 15 years ago there was a small broiler fire in the kitchen that was immediately extinguished but Patricia said there have been no problems since.